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Abstract

Two social roles for language have been distinguished by Edwards (2009) – the communicative and the symbolic. Using data from a survey of public attitudes to Gaelic in Scotland, the article investigates the extent to which people's view of language may be characterised as relating to these roles. Respondents were grouped, using statistical cluster analysis, according to their views of the communicative and symbolic roles of language. Indicators of membership of the resulting clusters were then used as explanatory variables in linear regression models to assess the relative importance of the communicative or symbolic view of Gaelic in explaining variation in attitudes to policy issues concerning Gaelic. Both sets of views of language were independently associated with attitudes to nearly all aspects of policy, but the view of Gaelic as symbol was mostly more strongly associated with attitudes to policy than the communicative view.

Keywords

Social roles of language; Scottish Gaelic; language as communication; language as symbol; cluster analysis.

1. Introduction: the communicative and symbolic roles of language

Policies relating to minority languages can address two distinct linguistic roles, the communicative and the symbolic (Edwards 2009, 55). Insofar as policy aims to maintain the use of a minority language, the purpose is concerned with communication, extending the range of circumstances in which the language might be used. On the other hand, language policy is linked to questions about group identity, not only because to make policy for a language is to take collective responsibility for it, but also because policy might be explicitly concerned with asserting the language's symbolic position.

This paper investigates empirically, in the case of Scottish Gaelic, the implications of these two views of language for attitudes to language policy. It draws upon a survey of the general population of Scotland in 2012. Using Edwards's distinction, we investigate the extent to which citizens see the purpose of policy on Gaelic in these terms – to increase opportunities for the use of Gaelic, and to enable Gaelic to contribute symbolically to a distinctive cultural heritage.

The communicative view of a minority language is related closely to the rights of individual speakers of it. Theories of liberalism have usually argued that political democracy can work effectively only if there is a shared language across the territory to which the political process refers (Barry 2001, 227), and Edwards (2009, 243) observes that having a single, dominant language can create equal opportunities for social participation. Thus, if a language spoken only by a small part of a society is to have an equal presence in public debate, people who speak it must have the right to use it in contexts where the dominant language would be expected to be used. What matters in distinguishing these purposes of policy from the active promotion of a language is that the role of policy in creating rights to communicate is neutral as to the value of different languages (Dworkin 1978).

The alternative, symbolic view of language is based on a principle expressed by Réaume (2000, 251): 'most people value their language not only instrumentally … but also intrinsically, as a cultural inheritance and as a marker of identity.' The concomitant political claims are that particular cultures have unique, intrinsic value (Kymlicka 1989, 151; Kymlicka 1995,113). An aspect of this cultural view of language is then a definition of language rights as belonging to groups, not exclusively to individuals (Taylor 1994, 58).

There is a link between the cultural view and the role of enabling communication, since without communication the language community would not exist (Taylor 1994, 59; Hornberger 1998, 450; Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1995, 495). May (2000, 366) argues that in order for the communicative purposes to be served, there has to be a wide acceptance of an 'intrinsic link between language and identity.' Nevertheless, the symbolic role of language does not depend on use. Kymlicka (1989, 167) distinguishes between cultural content and cultural membership. A language may become a cultural symbol even for people who do not speak it, as noted by Ó Riagáin (1997, 171) and Mac Giolla Chríost (2012) of the Irish language in Ireland. O'Reilly (2003, 17) reflects that 'whatever the eventual fate of Irish as a living language, it continues to influence Irish identity in both Northern Ireland and the Republic.' Similar conclusions about the importance of the symbolic role of language have been reached by Livingstone et al. (2011) of Welsh in Wales, and by Macdonald (1999) of Gaelic in Scotland. It may then be especially important to gauge the views of those who do not speak a language if we are to understand the symbolic principles that surround it.

An unanswered empirical question is whether citizens in general draw a contrast between the communicative and the symbolic interpretation of the social role of language. The question of communicative competence arises in connection with Gaelic because of the decline in the number of people able to speak it to 57,375 in 2011, 1.1% of the population of Scotland aged 3 and over, all of whom also speak English. The highest incidence of speakers is in the north-west of the country – 52% in the area covered by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles local council), 5% in the Highland council area, and 4% in Argyll and Bute (National Records of Scotland 2013); we refer to these three areas as the Highlands and Islands. Neverthless, just under half (48.5%) of people who reported being able to speak Gaelic lived outside these areas, partly because of migration but also because of policy since the 1970s aimed at increasing the number of speakers. Two particularly prominent such policies have been the development of Gaelic-medium primary education (O'Hanlon and Paterson, forthcoming; see also MacLeod 2003; Robertson 2013), and of Gaelic broadcasting (Cormack 2004; Milligan et al. 2011). There has also been a growing use of Gaelic on road signs and in other public information. These initiatives for Gaelic are taken more frequently in the more strongly Gaelic-speaking areas in the north-west than elsewhere.

The movement to increase the extent to which Gaelic is used was strengthened by the setting up of the Scottish parliament in 1999, which legislated in 2005 for a new agency, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, to promote the acquisition and use of the language. The principal aim of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in the words of the 2005 legislation, was to secure 'the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland commanding equal respect to the English language' (Marten 2009, 317; McLeod 2006; Oliver 2005). At the same time, the symbolic cultural role of Gaelic is much greater than the number of people able to speak it might indicate (Macdonald 1997, 1999; MacKinnon 1990;

Paterson et al. 2014;Withers 1984), and Bòrd na Gàidhlig has claimed (2007, 8) that 'the Gaelic language is a unique part of Scotland's national heritage'.Thus the communicative and symbolic views of language are present in Scottish discussions, and investigating their significance in connection with public attitudes to policy and about the future of Gaelic might cast light on how these theoretical debates are interpreted in everyday political practice.

Previous survey research (Scottish Government (2010) and MacKinnon (1981)), though informative about attitudes to particular aspects of Gaelic policy, has not sought to set attitudes in the context of a wider theoretical framework such as we are investigating here. Ethnographic research on Gaelic (Oliver 2005; McEwan-Fujita 2010, 2011) has found a recognition of the symbolic importance of Gaelic amongst those familiar with the language – students in schools where there is a Gaelic-medium stream, and adults learning the language. Oliver (2005, 3), following Chapman (1978), describes Gaelic as having been 'symbolically appropriated' as a part of identity, and reports that the young people whom he interviewed – whether or not they themselves could speak the language – could recognise it as denoting a sense of belonging to a community. McEwan-Fujita (2011) noted the existence of two discourses of Gaelic language revitalisation which treat the language as a symbol of identity – the sense of 'Gaelic as ancient', and, following MacDonald (1997), its place as 'a national language of Scotland.' These symbolic uses might be 'external' to language as a mode of communication, as Chapman (1978, 131) argues when he describes symbolic appropriation as a process 'in which Gaelic culture, language and life have become the focus of sentiments and associations not intrinsic to an autonomous Gaelic life, but required by the external discourse of the English language.' Oliver (2005, 22-3) contrasts symbolism with what he calls the instrumental role, in the sense simply of being able to speak Gaelic and using it 'pragmatically' to communicate.

Following from this theoretical, policy and research background, the paper aims to better understand the relative influence of the communicative and symbolic social roles of language in public attitudes to policy for Gaelic in Scotland.

2. Data and Methods

2.1 Data

The data were collected as part of the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey of 2012 (UK Data Service 2013). The survey aimed to provide a representative sample of adults aged 18 or over who were living in Scotland. The sampling frame was the Postcode Address File, a list of postal delivery points. The survey used a two-stage cluster sample, the clusters being 87 postcode sectors. In urban areas, they were selected with probability proportional to the number of addresses, and in rural areas the probability was proportional to twice the number of addresses. The sectors were stratified according to the Scottish Government urban-rural classification, by region and by percentage of household heads in non-manual occupations (Socio-Economic Groups 1-6 and 13, taken from the 2001 Census). Within each sector, 28 addresses were selected randomly. At addresses, interviewers randomly selected one adult. 1,229 interviews were conducted, a response rate of 54%. The achieved sample was weighted to match the age-and-sex structure of the population as estimated by the General Register Office for Scotland, and also to allow for the sample design. The weighted sample had a distribution of highest educational attainment that was close to that found by the much

larger Scottish Household Survey of 2011. As in the 2011 Census, around 1% of the sample were Gaelic speakers.

The questionnaire in the survey covered many topics as well as attitudes to Gaelic. It was administered by face-to-face interviewing, along with a computer-based self-completion option for questions that were particularly sensitive. For the questions on Gaelic, respondents were offered the option of conducting the interview in Gaelic, but none chose to do so.

The variables included in the analysis reported here were of three kinds: those taken to indicate positions on the communicative and the symbolic roles of language; a selection of opinions about issues in the public debate about Gaelic in Scotland; and questions supplying demographic information.

(a) Views about the social roles of language

Views on language as communication

For the view which sees language as primarily communication, we record respondents' view of the right to use Gaelic in five domains – when dealing with their local councils (responsible for administering local services such as education and social care), when appearing as a witness in a law court, when engaging with the health services, when speaking at a public meeting on a local issue, and when writing to their bank. In connection with each social domain, respondents were asked whether 'Gaelic speakers should have the right to use Gaelic, regardless of whether they can also speak English'. The responses categories were:

Should have the right to use Gaelic wherever they live in Scotland.

Should have the right to use Gaelic if they live somewhere Gaelic is spoken.

Should not have the right to use Gaelic in this situation.

In the analysis, these responses were scored 1, 2 and 3.

Views on language as symbol

The second framework is the symbolic role of language, in which it is related to heritage and identity. This was represented by four variables: respondents' views of the importance of Gaelic to Scottish heritage, to the heritage of the Highlands and Islands, and to their own heritage, and their views on how important the capacity to speak Gaelic is for 'being truly Scottish'. All were recorded on a five-point scale from 'very important' to 'not at all important', scored 1 to 5.

Respondents with missing data on any of the five communicative rights variables or on any of the four heritage and identity variables were omitted, leaving data from 1,144 respondents for analysis. We describe in Section 2.2 how we used these two sets of variables to represent views about the social roles of language along the two dimensions of communication and symbolism.

(b) Current issues in Gaelic

The aspects of language policy that are here investigated concern current issues in Gaelic policy as reflected, for example, in the topics which the Scottish Government chose to investigate in its 2010 survey (Scottish Government 2010). One set of policy issues, which related to using and learning Gaelic, was:

- whether road signs or written public information should be bilingual in Gaelic and English (response categories 'across Scotland', 'where Gaelic is spoken', and nowhere);
- whether parents should have a right to place their child in Gaelic-medium education (same response categories);
- whether the respondent would place a child of their own in Gaelic-medium education (5-point scale from 'very likely' to 'very unlikely');
- whether Gaelic should be a compulsory subject in schools for all children aged between 5 and 16 (5-point scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree');
- whether learning 'languages such as French is more useful than learning Gaelic' (same response categories);
- whether Government spending on promoting the use of Gaelic was too much, about right, or too little. (Respondents were told that current annual expenditure was about £24m, or £4.60 for each person in Scotland.)

The other set of policy issues related to the future of Gaelic:

- whether Gaelic-medium education or Gaelic television is essential to ensuring that the language continues to be spoken (5-point scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree');
- which of several groups has the main responsibility for whether Gaelic continues to be used in Scotland (parents who speak Gaelic, local communities, nursery schools and schools, the government, churches, the media, and other);
- preference for how many speakers of Gaelic there will be in 50 years' time (more, the same, or fewer).

(c) Demographic information

Information was used on respondents' sex, age, social class (UK National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification), highest educational attainment, and geographical area. Geographical area was defined as five broad regions,[1] and was intended to allow for the possibility that views might be affected by whether people live in an area where Gaelic is widely used or is prominent in local policy.

2.2 Methods

The analysis was in two stages – cluster analysis and linear regression. Cluster analysis was used to identify respondents with similar views on the questions about language as communication or on the questions about language as symbol. Preliminary principal components analysis suggested that the five variables recording views about the right to use Gaelic in specified domains constituted a single dimension that explained 75% of the variation; its eigenvalue (3.7) was very much greater than the next largest (0.40).[2] Similarly, for the variables about language as symbol, there was a single dominant principal component, explaining 56% of the variation, with eigenvalue 2.3 (the next largest being 0.86).

The clustering technique used squared Euclidean values as the measure of distance, and the Ward method of defining the distance between clusters (Krzanowski 2000, ch.

3).[3] The analysis was carried out in the statistical computing environment R using the package hclust.

The main statistical analysis then investigated the relative importance of the two sets of clusters in explaining people's attitudes to the policy issues summarised in Section 2.1 (b) above. This analysis was done by means of linear regression, which seeks to explain the variation in a particular variable in terms of specified explanatory factors. Here, we are seeking to explain the variation in attitudes to each of the policy questions noted in Tables 4 and 5 below in terms of specified explanatory factors, which here are mainly the variables measuring membership of the clusters. Attitudes on the issues were reduced to sets of dichotomies (as shown in the tables). The relative importance of the two sets of clusters was assessed by 'Type II' mean squares (rather than sum of squares, to take account of the fact that there is a different number of clusters in the two classifications). For each set of clusters, the Type II mean-square is defined to be the unique contribution which these clusters makes to explaining the dependent variable.

3. Results

3.1 Cluster analysis

(a) Gaelic as communication

In the agglomeration schedule from the cluster analysis, starting with 1,144 clusters and a closest distance of 711, the next distances over which clusters were formed were 423, 176, 170, 56, 53, then decreasing gradually by small amounts. Thus the reduction of distance was 288, 247, 6, 114, 3. This suggested three clusters might be enough to summarise positions on these variables unless the somewhat larger 114 might indicate the need for four. For three clusters, Table 1 shows the size of the clusters and the distributions with respect to the variables used in constructing the clusters. A reasonable characterisation of the three clusters might then be, in ascending order of support for the right to use Gaelic:

> *Communication cluster 1* (36%): almost no-one supports Gaelic language rights across Scotland, and the support for Gaelic rights in Gaelic areas varies by social domain.
>
> *Communication cluster 2* (41%): nearly all support Gaelic language rights in Gaelic areas, and the support for Gaelic rights across Scotland varies by social domain.
>
> *Communication cluster 3* (23%): everyone supports Gaelic language rights everywhere in Scotland.

Further analysis experimenting with four clusters resulted merely in a split of cluster 2. In one sub-cluster, everyone favoured the right to communicate in Gaelic solely in Gaelic areas for each social domain. In the other sub-cluster, some favoured such rights everywhere in Scotland. Since that description could also be said to apply to cluster 2 in Table 1 it was decided, for reasons of parsimony, to retain only the three communication clusters shown in that table.

(b) Gaelic as symbol

The agglometration schedule started with 1,144 clusters and a closest distance of 731; the next distances over which clusters were formed were 515, 249, 169, 120, 112 and 98, and thereafter in steps of about 20 or less. Thus the reduction of distance was 216,

266, 80, 49, 7 and 14. The small reduction of distance after 49 suggests five clusters. Table 2 shows their size, and their distribution with respect to the variables used in constructing the clusters. A summary description of the views of people in the symbolism clusters might be, again in ascending order of feeling that Gaelic is important:

Symbolism cluster 1 (14%): few people see Gaelic as important to heritage or identity (whether of Scotland, of the Highlands and Islands, or of themselves).

Symbolism cluster 2 (13%): Gaelic is perceived to be important to the heritage of the Highlands and Islands, but not otherwise important.

Symbolism cluster 3 (43%): Gaelic is perceived to be important to the heritage of Scotland, and of the Highlands and Islands, but is not important to the respondent personally, and speaking Gaelic is not perceived to be an important attribute of being Scottish.

Symbolism cluster 4 (17%): Gaelic is important to the respondent's own heritage, and to the heritage of the Highlands and Islands and of Scotland, but speaking Gaelic is not perceived to be important to being Scottish.

Symbolism cluster 5 (13%): Gaelic is important to the heritage of the Highlands and Islands and of Scotland, and speaking it is important to being Scottish. A majority (63%) of this group regard Gaelic as important to their own heritage.

Comparing the two classifications – of language as communication and language as cultural symbol – allows us to assess how the theoretical perspectives outlined in Section 1 relate to each other empirically. There is overlap between the two classifications (Table 3). For example, the symbolism clusters 3, 4 and 5, in which people regard Gaelic as important to the whole of Scotland, also show greater proportions favouring the right to communicate in Gaelic throughout Scotland (communication cluster 3) than do the other symbolism clusters. Nevertheless, there is also much discrepancy between the two sets of clusters, suggesting that views of the communicative and symbolic role of Gaelic cannot be inferred from each other. For example, in the strongest symbolism cluster 5, no more than about one third of people (36%) are in the strongest communication cluster 3, which shows that it is possible to regard Gaelic as a symbolically strong part of Scottish identity without supporting the right for Gaelic speakers to communicate in Gaelic throughout Scotland.

The lower part of the table, showing the percentages by row, suggests even more clearly that the correspondence between the communicative and symbolic classifications is weak. The modal category on symbolism is consistently cluster 3. There is a weak tendency for people who are sceptical of Gaelic as communication (in communication cluster 1) to be more likely to be in symbolism clusters 1 or 2 than people in the other communication clusters, and thus to be less willing to regard Gaelic as being symbolically important outwith the Highlands and Islands. The opposite is true of those who favour the right to communicate in Gaelic everywhere (communication cluster 3), but even they have a very clear majority not in the most strongly pro-Gaelic symbolism cluster 5.

Thus the empirical evidence reflects the distinction between the symbolic and communicative dimensions of language outlined by Edwards (2009). Although they

overlap, a respondent's position on one dimension cannot be reliably predicted from the position on the other.

(c) Demographic characteristics of the clusters

Membership of the two sets of clusters did not vary much by sex, age, social class, highest educational attainment, and region. For the communication clusters, the strongest variation was by age and region. Young people (aged under 45) were more likely than older people to be in cluster 3 which is most favourable to the right to communicate in Gaelic. Residents in the Gaelic areas were more likely than residents in other areas to be in the clusters least favourable to the right to communicate in Gaelic, perhaps reflecting through local experience an awareness of the difficulty of implementing rights to communicate in a lesser used language within public services. There was even less association of the symbolism clusters with any demographic factors, the only clear pattern being that there was a weak tendency for people in lower social classes or with low educational attainment to be less likely to be in symbolism cluster 3 (where Gaelic is believed to be important to the heritage of the Highlands and Islands and of Scotland), and a corresponding greater tendency to be in the symbolism clusters 1 and 2 that are least favourable to Gaelic. Insofar as these views about the role of Gaelic were not strongly differentiated demographically, they may be said to be characteristics of Scottish political culture as a whole.

3.2 Gaelic policies

We can now investigate whether there is a relationship between people's views of language as communication or symbol and their attitude to policies to support Gaelic. The left-hand part of Table 4 shows that the communication clusters clearly distinguish among different levels of support for increasing the prominence of Gaelic in Scotland. For example, people in communication cluster 3 (which favours language rights for Gaelic speakers across Scotland) tend to favour prominence for Gaelic across Scotland – on signs (83%), in public information (82%) and in Gaelic-medium education (82%). A majority of this cluster (58%) also believes that learning Gaelic should be a compulsory element of schooling between ages 5 and 16. By contrast, people in communication cluster 2 (which favours language rights for Gaelic speakers where Gaelic is spoken) tend to favour these policies in Gaelic areas rather than everywhere. For example, 96% of communication cluster 2 are in favour of bilingual public information in Gaelic areas, but only 47% are in favour of that throughout Scotland. People in communication clusters 2 and 3 are less likely to think that the government spends too much on Gaelic than people in communication cluster 1. Nevertheless, despite these patterns, we must also note that an interpretation based on language as communication cannot be the whole explanation since there are minorities in each communication cluster who have a different opinion from the majority of their cluster: for example, 17% of people even in cluster 3 do not favour signs throughout Scotland, and 53% in cluster 2 do favour such signs.

Part of the explanation of the spread of attitudes within the communication clusters is found when we turn to look at the symbolism clusters (right-hand part of Table 4). There is again broad consistency between the characterisation of the cluster and attitudes to policies. Thus people in symbolism cluster 2 (which sees Gaelic as being important to the heritage of the Highlands and Islands, but not in other respects) were much more likely to favour bilingual signs or information in the areas in which Gaelic

is spoken than across the whole of Scotland, a difference that diminishes as acceptance of a symbolic role for Gaelic increases through clusters 3, 4 and 5. Yet, as with the communication clusters, there are minorities who diverge – such as the 15-30% in symbol cluster 2 who favour bilingual signs, bilingual public information or access to Gaelic-medium education throughout Scotland.

Table 5 shows, similarly, attitudes to the future of Gaelic. Again, there is a broad tendency for attitudes to vary among the clusters in ways that are consistent with the meaning of the clusters. In the left-hand part of Table 5, for example, around 80% in the most pro-Gaelic communication cluster 3 believe that Gaelic-medium education and Gaelic broadcasting are important for the future of the language, whereas only around 60% in the least pro-Gaelic communication cluster 1 take this position. Attributing responsibility for the future of Gaelic to parents or communities declines from communication cluster 1 to communications cluster 3, whereas the gradient is in the opposite direction for attributing responsibility to education or the government: this suggests that holding strong views about the right to communicate (cluster 3) is associated with a belief that public-policy action, as opposed to individual or voluntary local action, is required to ensure that right. In the right-hand part of Table 5, the symbolism cluster 5 that sees the widest symbolic importance for Gaelic is more strongly politicised than the other symbolism clusters, in the sense that it has the highest proportion of people who believe in the importance of education and broadcasting (over 90%), and the highest proportions who believe in public action (schools and government).

Which of these two ways of summarising people's views about Gaelic – as communication or as symbol – better explains their attitudes to specific issues in policy for Gaelic? We assess this question by means of linear regression, in which we model attitudes on the questions in Section 2.1(b) above in terms of membership of the clusters. Table 6 shows the explanatory power of the two sets of clusters, using the type II mean squares corresponding to each set of clusters (as explained in Section 2). Because the interest here is to compare the overall explanatory power of each of the two sets of clusters (communication or symbolism), the regression coefficients are not shown: they followed the pattern shown by the percentages in earlier tables. The relative sizes of the mean squares shown in Table 6 were similar when statistical controls for sex, age, social class, educational attainment and region were included, and so are not shown here.

On most policy issues, both sets of clusters are independently associated with respondents' attitudes: there are very few non-significant results in Table 6. Thus neither type of view of Gaelic exhaustively explains people's attitude to policy. Moreover, neither set of clusters is uniformally more powerful than the other in explaining attitudes to policy issues. Nevertheless, on most topics the symbolism clusters matter more than the communication clusters. For example, in explaining variation in the likelihood of placing a child in Gaelic-medium education, the mean square in Table 6 associated with the symbolism clusters (8.1) is more than three times greater than the mean square associated with the communication clusters (2.5). A similar ratio (6.7 to 2.2) was found after the demographic controls were added.

The only clear exceptions to the tendency for the symbolism clusters to be more strongly associated with people's views of Gaelic policy are on rights of access to Gaelic-medium education, and on the use of Gaelic in signs and in public information:

for example, in explaining variation in the opinion that there should be a right of access to Gaelic-medium education throughout Scotland, the mean square associated with the symbolism clusters in Table 6 is 3.4, whereas the mean square for the communication clusters is more than four times greater, being 16.5; again, a similar ratio (2.8 to 11.3) was seen with the controls. These exceptions might tend to be interpreted as concerning Gaelic speakers' opportunities to communicate through the medium of Gaelic when receiving public services, and the other issues might tend to be interpreted as being about safeguarding the future of Gaelic, or about passing it on through the education system.

4. Conclusions

This analysis has provided statistical evidence relating to public views of the Gaelic language in Scotland. It has shown that people may be coherently grouped according to their views about the right for Gaelic speakers to communicate using Gaelic and, separately, according to their views about the place of Gaelic as a symbol of personal, regional or national heritage and identity. Both sets of views about the role of language are associated with attitudes to specific policy or other issues affecting Gaelic, but views about symbolism generally explain more of the variation in attitudes on these issues than do views about communicative rights, except where the policy issue itself might be interpreted as being directly about Gaelic speakers' communicating through the medium of Gaelic when receiving public services.

Such evidence shows that specific issues may be linked in the public mind to the communicative or symbolic social roles of languages. The advantage of developing the analysis in terms of statistical clusters is that they each comprise a group of people who share particular combinations of views about the social role of Gaelic. Thus, for instance, we know that the symbolism cluster 3 is internally coherent, in the sense that the respondents in the cluster believed that Gaelic is important to the cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands, and of Scotland, but did not believe Gaelic to be important to their own cultural heritage, or to being Scottish. Because these clusters are fairly large, we have reasonably firm grounding in evidence for the coherence of the views that we have detected. The clustering approach allows us to ask whether people who share a set of views about the social role of Gaelic tend also to share attitudes on specific issues. A different statistical approach would have been to have regressed opinions about policy on the separate variables that were used to detect the clusters. That approach, though informative about the association with these individual variables, would not have been able to say anything about the effects of holding a distinct combination of the features measured by the clusters.

We can then infer in conclusion from our evidence that Edwards's distinction between the 'communicative' and the 'symbolic' roles of language is empirically valuable. From the cluster analysis we have seen that public views of Gaelic may reasonably be interpreted in these terms – as the right for Gaelic speakers to communicate in Gaelic and as the position of Gaelic in cultural heritage and identity. The symbolic or cultural role is recognised by citizens generally, a conclusion which goes beyond those of Oliver (2005) and McEwan-Fujita (2010), who reported a recognition of the symbolic role of Gaelic among people in close proximity to Gaelic. Moreover, the aspect of the communicative role which we have examined here goes beyond the merely instrumental to become a matter of recognising the rights of Gaelic

speakers to use Gaelic even in circumstances where communication would not require the use of Gaelic. Thus a dichotomous contrast between symbolic and instrumental views of a language may have to be refined in the light of the role which individual rights might play. Consistent with the conclusions reached by the writers on Irish and Welsh which we noted earlier in the paper, the symbolism clusters were stronger than the communication clusters as explanations of variation in attitudes to most areas of policy. Nevertheless, both sets of clusters showed an independent, statistically significant association with nearly all the dependent variables, even after controlling for demographic factors. Thus the case of Scottish Gaelic adds to the general cogency of the distinction between communication and symbolism, and we would tentatively suggest that the statistical methods which we have adopted here may be a useful way of exploring these ideas in other specific contexts.

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Tables

Table 1

Characteristics of communication clusters

	Cluster number (ascending order of strength of support for Gaelic as communication)		
	Communication cluster 1	Communication cluster 2	Communication cluster 3
Size of cluster:			
Number	443	470	231
Percentage of whole	36	41	23
Percentage supporting the right to communicate in Gaelic across Scotland			
Local council	11	31	100
Witness	2	42	100
Doctor or nurse	1	28	100
Public meeting	4	17	100
Bank	3	22	100
Percentage supporting the right to communicate in Gaelic at least in areas in which Gaelic is spoken			
Local council	62	99	100
Witness	27	98	100
Doctor or nurse	31	95	100
Public meeting	44	94	100
Bank	23	90	100

Percentages are weighted.

Table 2

Characteristics of symbolism clusters

	Cluster number (ascending order of strength of acceptance of Gaelic as symbol)				
	Symbolism cluster 1	Symbolism cluster 2	Symbolism cluster 3	Symbolism cluster 4	Symbolism cluster 5
Size of cluster:					
Number	163	138	499	192	152
Percentage of whole	14	13	43	17	13
Percentage saying that Gaelic is 'very important' or 'fairly important' to heritage of:					
Scotland	20	0	100	99	99
Highlands and Islands	6	100	100	100	100
Respondent	1	0	0	93	63
Percentage saying that speaking Gaelic is 'very important' or 'fairly important' to being 'truly Scottish'	4	2	0	0	98

Percentages are weighted.

Table 3

Relationship of clusters

	Cluster number (ascending order of strength of acceptance of Gaelic as symbol)				
	Symbolism cluster 1	Symbolism cluster 2	Symbolism cluster 3	Symbolism cluster 4	Symbolism cluster 5
Communication cluster (ascending order of strength of support for Gaelic as communication)					
Column percentages					
Communication cluster 1	56	57	33	27	17
Communication cluster 2	33	33	44	42	47
Communication cluster 3	11	11	23	31	36
Row percentages					
Communication cluster 1	21	20	40	13	6
Communication cluster 2	11	10	46	17	15
Communication cluster 3	7	6	44	23	21

Percentages are weighted.

Table 4

Views on policy issues in Gaelic, by communication and symbolism cluster

Percentages within clusters	Communication cluster (ascending order of strength of support for right to communicate in Gaelic)			Symbolism cluster (ascending order of strength of acceptance of Gaelic as symbol)				
	Communication cluster 1	Communication cluster 2	Communication cluster 3	Symbolism cluster 1	Symbolism cluster 2	Symbolism cluster 3	Symbolism cluster 4	Symbolism cluster 5
Percentage supporting the policy across Scotland								
Signs in Gaelic	28	53	83	31	25	50	69	74
Public information in Gaelic	21	47	82	24	15	45	66	76
Percentage supporting the policy at least in areas in which Gaelic is spoken								
Signs in Gaelic	74	93	96	64	74	92	95	95
Public information in Gaelic	75	96	97	70	75	93	95	98
Right of access to GME[1]								
Across Scotland	31	46	82	32	30	44	68	73
At least in areas in which Gaelic is spoken	82	97	99	75	87	95	97	98
Likelihood of placing child in GME[1] (% very or fairly likely)	14	24	45	9	7	17	43	64
Gaelic compulsory 5-16 (% strongly agree or agree)	25	37	58	9	9	31	63	82
Learning French more useful than learning Gaelic (% strongly agree or agree)	71	56	38	61	81	62	47	29
Government spending on Gaelic								
Too much	49	29	17	65	63	29	15	10
About right	39	50	46	29	28	52	50	47
Too little	8	15	33	3	5	13	27	41

Percentages are weighted.

[1] GME is Gaelic-medium education.

Table 5

Attitudes to the future of Gaelic, by communication and symbolismcluster

Percentages within clusters	Communication cluster (ascending order of strength of support for right to communicate in Gaelic)			Symbolism cluster (ascending order of strength of acceptance of Gaelic as symbol)				
	Communication cluster 1	Communication cluster 2	Communication cluster 3	Symbolism cluster 1	Symbolism cluster 2	Symbolism cluster 3	Symbolism cluster 4	Symbolism cluster 5
GME[1] important for future of Gaelic (% strongly agree or agree)	62	67	82	30	49	73	87	92
Gaelic TV important for future of Gaelic (% strongly agree or agree)	59	68	84	25	43	75	89	90
Main responsibility for future of Gaelic								
Parents who speak Gaelic	41	36	29	39	49	37	36	17
Local communities	23	22	13	17	25	23	18	13
Nursery schools and schools	10	22	21	13	10	14	22	36
Government	17	17	31	14	10	22	21	29
Preference for future of Gaelic								
More speakers	27	47	65	11	11	42	69	84
Same number of speakers	43	40	25	38	58	45	25	12
Fewer speakers	30	13	10	52	31	13	6	4

Percentages are weighted.

[1] GME is Gaelic-medium education.

Table 6

Relative explanatory power of communication clusters and symbolism clusters: no controls

	Type II mean square	
Dichotomous dependent variable	Communication clusters	Symbolism clusters
Road signs in Gaelic		
Across Scotland	16.7	3.8
At least in areas in which Gaelic is spoken	3.6	2.3
Public information in Gaelic		
Across Scotland	18.8	5.6
At least in areas in which Gaelic is spoken	5.1	1.7
Right of access to GME[1]		
Across Scotland	16.5	3.4
At least in areas in which Gaelic is spoken	2.2	1.2
Placing child in GME (very or fairly likely)	2.5	8.1
Gaelic compulsory 5-16 (strongly agree or agree)	2.5	13.3
Learning French more useful than learning Gaelic (strongly agree or agree)	4.1	4.0
Government spending on promoting use of Gaelic		
Too much	3.9	8.9
Too little	2.1	2.7
Gaelic-medium education important for future of Gaelic (strongly agree or agree)	0.4 NS	10.9
Gaelic television important for future of Gaelic (strongly agree or agree)	0.9	11.6
Main responsibility for future of Gaelic:		
Parents who speak Gaelic	0.4 NS	1.3
Local communities	0.8	0.05 NS
Nursery schools and schools	0.5 WS	0.9
Government	1.5	0.4 WS
Future of Gaelic: more speakers	3.3	13.7

[1] *GME is Gaelic-medium education.*

All results are statistically significant at the 0.01 level except those indicated by WS (weakly significant – at 0.05 level) or NS (not significant at 0.10 level).

[1] The regions are defined in terms of local-authority areas as:

Gaelic areas: Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles), Highlands, Argyll and Bute.

North east: Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Moray, Orkney, Shetland.

East: Angus, Clackmannan, Dundee, East Lothian, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Midlothian, Perth and Kinross, Stirling, West Lothian.

West: East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire.

South: Dumfries and Galloway, Borders.

[2] Principal component analysis assesses whether several variables are so closely related to each other that they might be plausibly combined into a single variable. This is assessed by whether there is a dominant eigenvalue, which is a measure of how much of all the variation in the set of variables may be captured by a single summary variable. When the largest eigenvalue is much larger than the next eigenvalue, it is reasonable to combine the variables (Krzanowski 2000, ch. 2).

[3] Cluster analysis forms larger and larger clusters by grouping together cases that are similar to each other in terms of their responses to the variables that are included (here, the views about rights or the views about symbolism). The similarity between two cases was measured here as the sum of the squares of the differences between corresponding values on these variables, a measure known as 'squared Euclidean distance'. The agglomeration schedule records this process of successive grouping together of cases. It is recommended in the literature to stop merging clusters in this way when the distance over which the merger would take place becomes small (Krzanowski 2000, ch. 3).